

Siebe Gorman & Co Diving Suit.



The collaboration between a quick-thinking former sailor determined to save local horses from a stable fire and a German-born British engineer

created the first-ever commercial diving suit in 1829. The design produced by this company would become the iconic helmeted diving figure that was the pinnacle of the technology for over one hundred years and continues to inspire the imagination to this day. Michaan's Auctions is proud to offer a **Siebe Gorman & Co Diving Suit** (\$4/6,000) for sale in our July Gallery Auction, held on Friday, July 19th.

Rudimentary diving suits had been designed and tested as early as the 17th century; however, these were primarily one-off productions that were only meant to be demonstrated to the public. The first commercially viable diving suits were built by Augustus Siebe in 1828 at the request of Charles

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and John Deane, who had invented an airtight helmet for use by firefighters five years earlier. In 1829, the brothers were able to recover artifacts from a recent shipwreck on the coast of eastern England, highlighting the potential for civil engineering and commercial uses. Siebe improved the design over the following decade, introducing a valve that allowed divers to operate in any position without risk of flooding, and making the helmet detachable from the suit. These advancements contributed to the rapid development of underwater civil engineering, underwater salvage, commercial diving, and naval diving. Later versions of the helmet included a carbon dioxide scrubber to allow for deep-diving work and a telephone port, which allowed for communication between the diver and workers on the surface.

Charles and John Deane were born in 1796 and 1800 respectively, near Ipswich in southern England. Both boys attended The Royal Hospital School, Greenwich a naval-oriented boarding school, then joined the East India Company from the age of fourteen to twenty-one. After returning home they each found work in a local shipyard, making repairs on the many vessels moving in and out of the large commercial port in the city. A few years following his return to England, John was present at the site of a stable fire



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and quickly jumped into action to save the horses. He wore a medieval battle helmet, then ran a hose between his helmet and an empty fire department water pump outside, which provided him clean air while he brought the horses out. He and his brother patented the idea and after a couple of years, hired Augustus Siebe to modify the helmet for underwater use.



Augustus Siebe was born in Saxony, Germany in 1788. He was educated in Berlin and became a brass founder, before fighting against Napoleon in the Prussian army from

1812-1815. After his service in the army, he moved to London, where he tried several mechanical trades, before settling on work as an engineer. After advancing the diving suit design as mentioned above, he passed his business to his son Henry and William Gorman and died in 1872.

The company rapidly expanded under the stewardship of Henry Siebe and William Gorman, becoming highly successful as the diving suits helped cities complete much-needed new infrastructure projects. Urban populations in countries across the world expanded rapidly in the latter half of the 19th century as industrialization attracted workers to the new factories which were constantly springing up. The company earned government contracts to produce gas masks in World War I and II, a natural expansion of their existing production capabilities, and

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continued to advance diving technology until the end of the 20th century.

This lot offered by Michaan's Auctions includes the iconic Siebe Gorman & Co. helmet dating to the early 20th century. Made of brass with a round viewport and multiple attachments, including a rubber collar, this helmet is an excellent example of the classic design that dominated diving technology for nearly one hundred years. Also included is a full-body canvas suit, a pack with numerous hoses and other equipment attached, and a pair of weighted shoes. The shoes feature steel toes, rubber soles, and a leather body construction, with belt straps and a steel insole to complete the attachment.

A Siebe Gorman & Co Diving Suit (\$4/6,000) will be offered in

Michaan's Auctions July Gallery Auction on Friday, July 19th. This sale features interesting and important pieces from the Furniture & Decorations Department, works from important artists brought to you by the Fine Art Department, and a collection of well-regarded pieces from the Jewelry Department. The auction is led by a pair of candelabras in the Rococo style by French sculptor Claude Michel, a portfolio of woodcuts by the preeminent Surrealist Salvador Dali, and an impressive Rolex watch in black and gold.

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